

Influence of Spiritual Intelligence on Forgiveness Among Senior Citizens: A Cross-Sectional Study

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ABSTRACT

In later life, many individuals reflect on past mistakes and regrets, making forgiveness essential for inner peace and well-being. Spiritual intelligence, the ability to find meaning and rise above difficulties, may support this forgiving attitude in old age. This study examined 102 senior citizens aged 60–81 years in Chidambaram Taluk, Tamil Nadu, using a cross-sectional design. Participants completed the Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory (SISRI-24) and the Bolton Forgiveness Scale (BFS). Results showed that middle-old and rural residents reported higher spiritual intelligence, while forgiveness was greater among women and rural participants. Analyses confirmed a strong positive relationship between spiritual intelligence and forgiveness. The findings suggest that strengthening spiritual intelligence can promote forgiveness, resilience, and psychological well-being in aging.

Keywords: *Spiritual Intelligence, Forgiveness, Senior Citizens, Aging, Psychological Well-Being*

Life is a journey full of diverse emotional and relational experiences. While youth is typically associated with ambition and striving, old age provides introspection, reflection, and a more in-depth examination of one's past. During this later period, many senior citizens assess their lives, relationships, and unresolved emotions. Although aging can provide knowledge, it also poses emotional and psychological obstacles such as loneliness, sadness, decreasing health, and a sense of purposelessness after retirement. These factors can have a significant impact on mental health, emphasizing the significance of adopting coping mechanisms to promote emotional healing and resilience. In this context, forgiveness emerges as a vital coping strategy, enabling older adults to process unresolved issues, alleviate emotional distress, and restore psychological balance. But forgiving frequently demands emotional fortitude, compassion, and a readiness to let go of grudges—elements that may be impacted by more profound self-awareness. Spiritual intelligence comes into play here. The ability to apply spiritual knowledge to life situations is known as spiritual intelligence, and it enables people to find meaning, preserve inner calm, and make kind decisions. Through acceptance, introspection, and self-awareness, it assists seniors in coping with regrets, loss, and emotional suffering as they age. King (2008) identifies four components of spiritual intelligence: Conscious State Expansion, Transcendental Awareness, Personal Meaning Production, and Critical Existential Thinking. These elements support a sense of

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belonging to something bigger than oneself, help people understand suffering, and help them make meaning of life events. According to research, spiritual intelligence improves emotional control and encourages prosocial behaviors such as forgiveness. Similarly, Worthington (2005) defines forgiveness as replacing negative emotions such as rage with empathy and compassion. Both concepts are critical to the psychological well-being of older persons. Despite increasing interest in these topics, little research has been conducted on the direct impact of spiritual intelligence on forgiveness among senior individuals, particularly in India. Most present research focuses on younger populations or examines these variables independently. Given India's culturally rich spiritual traditions and an increasing older population, it is critical to investigate how spiritual intelligence might promote emotional well-being through forgiveness in later life. The current study is to evaluate the influence of spiritual intelligence on forgiveness among seniors aged 60 to 81. Using standardized psychological measures and a cross-sectional methodology, the study investigates whether spiritual intelligence predicts forgiveness and how demographic characteristics such as age, gender and location may influence these categories. Understanding this link adds to the psychological literature on aging and provides insights that may inform future therapies and support services for older persons.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Objectives:

- To examine differences in spiritual intelligence between young-old and middle-old adults.
- To explore gender differences in spiritual intelligence.
- To investigate the effect of locality on spiritual intelligence.
- To examine differences in forgiveness between young-old and middle-old adults.
- To explore gender differences in forgiveness.
- To investigate the effect of locality on forgiveness.
- To examine the correlation between spiritual intelligence and forgiveness.
- To determine whether spiritual intelligence significantly predicts forgiveness.
- To investigate the relationship between dimensions of spiritual intelligence and forgiveness.

Hypotheses:

- H1) There will be no significant difference in spiritual intelligence between young-old and middle-old adults.
- H2) There will be no significant difference in spiritual intelligence between males and females.
- H3) There will be no significant difference in spiritual intelligence between rural and urban residents.
- H4) There will be no significant difference in forgiveness between young-old and middle-old adults.
- H5) There will be no significant difference in forgiveness between males and females.
- H6) There will be no significant difference in forgiveness between rural and urban residents.
- H7) There will be no significant correlation between spiritual intelligence and forgiveness.
- H8) Spiritual intelligence will not significantly predict forgiveness.
- H9) There will be no significant relationship between dimensions of spiritual intelligence and forgiveness.

Study design and participants:

A cross-sectional quantitative research design was chosen to analyze the influence of spiritual intelligence on forgiveness among older adults. This method was chosen, because data could be acquired at a single point in time and would allow for an extensive examination of correlations between psychological characteristics without manipulations. This was appropriate as it allowed identification of pre-existing patterns in spiritual intelligence and forgiveness in a naturalistic environment. The sample included 102 older individuals, men and women, aged between 60 years to 81. A non-probability convenience sampling method was used. Eligible participants were aged 60–81 years. The highest age restriction of 81 was determined by the applicability of the Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory (SISRI-24), which is most appropriate for people up to this age. Individuals with severe cognitive impairment, significant hearing or visual impairments, or active mental illnesses that may interfere with comprehension or response accuracy were excluded.

Study setting:

Chidambaram Taluk, Cuddalore District, Tamil Nadu was the area chosen for this study and data were collected from both urban and rural areas. This area was selected due to its proximity and the availability of a varied elderly population that occupied all socio-demographic ranges. These environmental and cultural influences as they bear upon the constructs are also useful given the setting.

Tools used:

The study utilized two standardized psychometric instruments to measure the core variables:

1. **Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory (SISRI-24)** Developed by King (2008), SISRI-24 is a 24-item scale designed to assess spiritual intelligence. It evaluates four key dimensions:

- Critical Existential Thinking (CET)
- Personal Meaning Production (PMP)
- Transcendental Awareness (TA)
- Conscious State Expansion (CSE)

Respondents rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “not at all true of me” to “completely true of me.” The total score reflects the overall level of spiritual Intelligence. The SISRI-24 has demonstrated strong internal consistency in previous research, with Cronbach’s $\alpha = .92$ for the total scale and α values ranging from .78 to .91 across its four dimensions (King, 2008).

2. **Bolton Forgiveness Scale (BFS)** This scale assesses an individual’s capacity to forgive based on cognitive and emotional responses to offenses. The items focus on thoughts of resentment, emotional release, empathy, and the ability to move past interpersonal hurts. The BFS consists of 18 statements and measures three dimensions of forgiveness:

- Coming to Terms and Letting Go (CTLG)
- Developing Positive Feelings (DPF)
- Giving Benefit of Doubt (GBD)

Responses are recorded on a 5-point scale, and the overall score indicates the degree of forgiveness. The Bolton Forgiveness Scale has also shown acceptable reliability in its validation study, with Cronbach’s α reported as .87 (Mauger et al., 1992).

Both tools are self-report instruments and were administered in English and Tamil. For participants who were illiterate or had difficulty reading, the researcher provided oral

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explanations and read each item aloud in their preferred language to ensure full comprehension and accurate responses.

Data collection procedure:

I collected the data firsthand. Participants were contacted in residential neighborhoods, community centers, and other public areas. The study's purpose was stated simply, and verbal consent was acquired prior to the distribution of the questionnaire. When filling out forms, I ensured privacy and a distraction-free atmosphere. I was present to answer questions. Each session lasted approximately 20-30 minutes. Throughout the process, ethical criteria such as confidentiality, autonomy, and voluntary participation were strictly observed.

Ethical Considerations:

I conducted the study in accordance with the ethical standards of Annamalai University. All participants were informed about the objectives of the research, assured of confidentiality, and provided informed consent before participation.

Statistical Analysis:

The acquired data was collected, processed, and analyzed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The **Kolmogorov-Smirnov test** was used to determine the normality of the data. Because the data showed a large divergence from normal distribution, non-parametric statistical approaches were used. **Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient** was utilized to investigate the association between Spiritual Intelligence (total score) and Forgiveness. **The Mann-Whitney U Test** was used to compare Spiritual Intelligence and Forgiveness results across demographic groups. Each variable was tested separately based on age (60-74 and 75-81 years), gender (male and female), and location (rural or urban). These classifications enabled meaningful non-parametric research of how demographic factors might affect the two psychological dimensions. **A Simple Linear Regression Analysis** was used to assess if Spiritual Intelligence predicts Forgiveness, using Forgiveness as the dependent variable and Spiritual Intelligence as the independent variable. Statistical significance was defined at $p < 0.05$ in all analyses. A full correlation matrix and descriptive statistics could not be included; however, all regression analyses were conducted appropriately, and assumptions were verified.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic statistics:

The whole sample comprised 102 elderly individuals aged 60 to 81 years. The participants were divided into two age groups: young-old (60-74 years, 55.9%) and middle-old (75-81 years, 44.1%). In terms of gender, 44 (43.1%) were male and 58 (56.9%) were female. In terms of location, 59 participants (57.8%) lived in rural areas, whereas 43 participants (42.2%) lived in cities. This demographic distribution shows a balanced representation of major factors and serves to frame the ensuing statistical studies.

Descriptive statistics:

The descriptive analysis found significant diversity in both study variables. Spiritual intelligence scores ranged from 20 to 86, with an average of 57.3 and a standard deviation of 19.4, showing moderate variance among participants. Forgiveness scores varied from 28 to 76, with a mean of 56.2 and a standard deviation of 12.2, indicating a significant amount of individual variation. These findings provide a basic overview of the variable distributions, which will serve as the foundation for future statistical investigations.

Table 1: Spiritual intelligence across demographic variables

Demographic variable	Sub variables	N	Median	U Value	p Value
Age	Young-Old	57	51.0	875	0.006
	Middle-Old	45	69.0		
Gender	Male	44	65.0	1158	0.425
	Female	58	64.0		
Locality	Rural	59	70.0	644	< .01
	Urban	43	43.0		

Table 1 shows the results of the Mann–Whitney U-test for Spiritual Intelligence across age, gender, and locality. For age, the young-old group (60–74 years) had a median score of 51.0, while the middle-old group (75–81 years) had 69.0. The U value was 875, $p = .006$, indicating a significant difference; hence, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This may be because older adults develop greater reflection and acceptance with age. For gender, males had a median score of 65.0 and females 64.0. The U value was 1158, $p = .425$, showing no significant difference; therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted and the alternative hypothesis is rejected. This suggests that Spiritual Intelligence is shaped more by life experiences than by gender. For locality, rural participants scored 70.0 and urban participants 43.0. The U value was 644, $p < .01$, indicating a significant difference; thus, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This may be because rural residents are more connected to traditional practices and community life, which fosters spirituality.

Table 2: Forgiveness across demographic variables

Demographic variable	Sub variables	N	Median	U Value	p Value
Age	Young-Old	57	58.0	1113	0.253
	Middle-Old	45	60.0		
Gender	Male	44	59.0	960	0.033
	Female	58	62.0		
Locality	Rural	59	63.0	653	< .01
	Urban	43	51.0		

Table 2 shows the results of the Mann–Whitney U-test for Forgiveness across age, gender, and locality. For age, the young-old group (60–74 years) had a median score of 58.0, while the middle-old group (75–81 years) had 60.0. The U value was 1113, $p = .253$, indicating no significant difference; hence, the null hypothesis is accepted and the alternative hypothesis is rejected. This suggests that age does not strongly influence Forgiveness. For gender, males had a median score of 59.0 and females 62.0. The U value was 960, $p = .033$, showing a significant difference; therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This may be because females often show greater emotional expressiveness and relational orientation, fostering higher Forgiveness. For locality, rural participants scored 63.0 and urban participants 51.0. The U value was 653, $p < .01$, indicating a significant difference; thus, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This may be because rural residents often live in closer-knit communities with stronger traditional values, which encourage Forgiveness.

Table 3: Spearman’s correlation between spiritual intelligence and forgiveness

Variables	Spiritual Intelligence	Forgiveness
Spiritual Intelligence	1.00	0.707
Forgiveness	0.707	1.00

Table 3 shows the Spearman’s rank correlation between Spiritual Intelligence and Forgiveness. The analysis revealed a positive correlation ($r = .707, p < .01$), indicating that higher levels of spiritual intelligence are associated with higher levels of forgiveness. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This may be because individuals with greater spiritual intelligence possess enhanced self-awareness, empathy, and coping strategies, which facilitate the ability to forgive others.

Table 4: Simple regression analysis of spiritual intelligence predicting forgiveness

Regression weights	B Value	Beta Value	R ²	F	p Value
SI ^a →F ^b	0.450	0.715	0.511	104	< .001

Note: a→ Predictor Variable: Spiritual Intelligence

b→ Outcome Variable: Forgiveness

Table 4 shows the result of the regression analysis conducted to determine the influence of Spiritual Intelligence on Forgiveness. The model was found to be significant ($F = 104, p < .001$) with an R^2 value of 0.511, indicating that 51.1% of the variance in Forgiveness can be explained by Spiritual Intelligence. The regression weight for Spiritual Intelligence was significant ($B = 0.450, \text{Beta} = 0.715$), suggesting that higher levels of Spiritual Intelligence significantly predict higher levels of Forgiveness among senior citizens.

Table 5: Multiple regression analysis of spiritual intelligence dimensions predicting forgiveness

Regression weights	B Value	Beta Value	p Value
CET ^a →F ^b	0.356	0.281	< .001
PMP ^a →F ^b	0.472	0.228	< .01
TA ^a →F ^b	0.546	0.332	< .001
CSE ^a →F ^b	0.643	0.297	< .001

Note: Here, $R^2 = 0.519, F = 26.20$

a→ Predictor Variable: Dimensions of Spiritual Intelligence

b→ Outcome Variable: Forgiveness

Table 5 shows the result of the multiple regression analysis examining the influence of the subscales of Spiritual Intelligence on Forgiveness. The model was significant ($F = 26.20, p < .001$) with an R^2 value of 0.519, indicating that 51.9% of the variance in Forgiveness was explained by the predictors. Among the subscales, Transcendental Awareness (TA; $B = 0.546, \text{Beta} = 0.332, p < .001$) emerged as the strongest predictor of Forgiveness, followed by Conscious State Expansion (CSE; $B = 0.643, \text{Beta} = 0.297, p < .001$), Critical Existential Thinking (CET; $B = 0.356, \text{Beta} = 0.281, p < .001$), and Personal Meaning Production (PMP; $B = 0.472, \text{Beta} = 0.228, p < .01$). These findings indicate that all dimensions of Spiritual Intelligence significantly contributed to predicting Forgiveness among senior citizens.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Middle-Old (75-81) participants showed higher levels of spiritual intelligence.
2. There was no significant difference in spiritual intelligence between male and female senior citizens.
3. Participants from rural areas exhibited higher spiritual intelligence compared to urban participants.
4. Forgiveness did not significantly differ across age groups among senior citizens.
5. Female participants displayed higher levels of forgiveness than males.
6. Rural participants showed greater forgiveness than urban participants.
7. Senior citizens with higher spiritual intelligence tended to be more forgiving.
8. Spiritual intelligence significantly predicted forgiveness among senior citizens.
9. Among the Spiritual Intelligence dimensions, transcendental awareness had the strongest influence on forgiveness, followed by conscious state expansion, critical existential thinking, and personal meaning production.

This study provides insights into the psychological role of spiritual intelligence in helping older adults develop forgiveness. Instead of just looking at differences in age or scores, the research shows how being spiritually aware and engaging in inner reflection can help people in later years build emotional strength. As people age, the ability to handle sadness from relationships, release past hurts, and show compassion becomes more important for their emotional health. The study shows how spiritual abilities—like feeling connected, finding deeper meaning, and being more aware—can act as tools that protect emotional well-being during this time.

In practice, the findings suggest that including spiritual development in therapy and community programs for older adults could be very beneficial. Giving seniors chances to explore their personal values, practice mindfulness, and focus on inner growth might help them adjust better emotionally and connect more with others. While this study had some limitations because of where it was done and how it was carried out, its ideas have wide importance. Future research should include more diverse groups, use long-term or in-depth methods, and look at how spiritual intelligence training can be used to improve forgiveness and mental health in older people. By better understanding these inner qualities, we can help older adults achieve more emotional balance and live with greater dignity.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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